

AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES
American Citizens Services Newsletter

U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
October 2008

This periodic email newsletter is a service to U.S. citizens who live in or are travelling through the consular district of the U.S. Consulate General Melbourne, which comprises the States of Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Through this American Citizens Services newsletter, the Consular Section highlights information pertaining to consular procedures, policies, and other topics of general interest to U.S. citizens who have registered with the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit and provided an email address. If you believe others would benefit from receiving this newsletter, please forward it to them and encourage them to subscribe. To subscribe to our periodic newsletter and receive other updates, please register online by following this link:
<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>.

If you do not wish to receive this periodic newsletter, or would like to be removed from our email list, please email us at MelbourneACS@state.gov.

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INFORMATION FOR VOTING IN U.S. ELECTIONS

As the countdown continues to the U.S. elections on November 04, when the U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne will be closed for Melbourne Cup Day, it is important that U.S. citizens overseas who wish to vote in the 2008 elections register and request their absentee ballot NOW. The U.S. Consulate General has posted detailed information on this topic on our Web site at

<http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/voting.html>. That information includes links to the Federal Voting Assistance Program at www.fvap.gov, which site includes state by state instructions and information on how U.S. citizens who have never lived in the U.S. may vote. The FVAP also maintains toll free numbers for U.S. citizen voters in certain areas; the one in Australia is 1-800-836325. Please note that votes may not be cast at the U.S. Consulate General; rather, each absentee voter must request and return an absentee ballot using the procedures detailed at www.fvap.gov.

Voting eligibility and residency requirements are determined by the various U.S. states, and are available on-line at <http://fvap.gov/pubs/vag.html>. Your legal state of residence for voting purposes is the state where you last resided immediately prior to departure from the United States. Voting rights extend to overseas citizens even though they may no longer own property or have other ties to their last state of residence, and even if their intent to return to that state may be uncertain. For those who have never resided in the U.S., sixteen states, to date, allow eligible U.S. citizens to register where a parent would be eligible to vote.

To register to vote and/or apply for an absentee ballot, you can use the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). The on-line version, the OFPCA, is accepted by all states and territories except American Samoa and Guam. Voters from American Samoa and Guam must use the standard form of the FPCA, available at the Consulate General or through many American civic groups. The on-line OFPCA form must be completed legibly, printed, signed, dated, and mailed to your local election officials. Your state may allow faxing to speed the process, but you will still need to send in the original by mail. Use an envelope and affix proper postage. The official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance, www.fvap.gov, has a wealth of information about absentee voting, including the state-specific instructions for completing the FPCA form, links to state and local officials, and a downloadable emergency ballot for use by those who register in time but fail to receive an official ballot.

As a general rule, you should try to send in the FPCA so that it reaches your local election officials at least forty-five days before the first election in which you are eligible to vote --- ample time for them to process the request and send you a blank ballot. If applying for both registration and an absentee ballot, you may want to mail the FPCA earlier. One FPCA will qualify you to receive all ballots for Federal offices for the next two regular Federal elections (through 2010). However, we recommend that you submit a new FPCA in January of every year, and whenever you move, to ensure that your most recent mailing and e-mail addresses are on file with your local election officials.

Under normal circumstances, most states and territories begin sending ballots to overseas citizens 30-45 days before an election. However, if you haven't received your ballot within three weeks of your state's ballot receipt deadline, and you are required to return your voted ballot by mail, you should download, complete, sign, date, and send in a Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB), available at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefwab.html>. Make sure it is witnessed if required by your state. If you subsequently receive your regular absentee ballot, execute it and return it regardless of when you receive it. Court decisions sometimes require late counting of ballots voted by Election Day, but received by local election officials for a specified period of time following Election Day.

EMERGENCY BALLOTS

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) serves as an emergency ballot for voters who registered in time but fail to receive an official ballot from local election officials. You can access the FWAB at www.fvap.gov. If you receive your state absentee ballot after submitting the FWAB, you can still vote and return the state ballot up to and including Election Day.

ABSENTEE VOTING WEEK - OCTOBER 12 TO 18, 2008

October 12 to October 18, 2008 has been designated Absentee Voting Week. Overseas voters should vote and return their state absentee ballot or the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) during this week.

STATE BALLOT RETURN DEADLINES

Below is a list of General Election Deadlines for Overseas Citizens and Military stationed in the U.S. and abroad. States appearing twice on the list are indicated with an asterisk. Please also be aware of states with postmark deadlines.

November 3:

Mississippi*, Overseas Citizens, 5pm
North Carolina, 5pm

November 4:

Alabama, 12pm
American Samoa, 1:30pm
Arizona, 7pm
Colorado, 7pm
Connecticut, COP
Delaware, 8pm
Guam, 8pm
Hawaii, COP
Idaho, 8pm
Indiana, COP
Kentucky, COP
Louisiana
Maine, 8pm
Michigan, 8pm
Minnesota, COP
Mississippi*, Overseas Military, 7pm
Missouri, 7pm

Montana, 8pm
Nebraska, COP
Nevada, 7pm
New Hampshire, 5pm
New Jersey, COP
New Mexico, COP
Oklahoma, 7pm
Puerto Rico, 3pm
Rhode Island, 9pm
South Carolina, COP
South Dakota, COP
Tennessee, COP
Virginia, 7pm
West Virginia
Wisconsin*, Overseas Citizens, COP
Wyoming, COP

November 7:
Georgia, postmarked by Nov. 4
North Dakota

November 10:
Iowa, 12pm, postmarked by Nov. 3
Texas, in delivery by Nov. 4

November 11:
New York*, Overseas Citizens, postmarked by Nov. 3
Pennsylvania, postmarked by Nov. 3

November 14:
Arkansas, 5pm
District of Columbia
Florida, 7pm
Ohio
Virgin Islands
Wisconsin*, Military, 5pm, postmarked by Nov. 4
Massachusetts, postmarked Nov. 4

November 17:
New York*, Military, postmarked by Nov. 3

November 18:
Illinois, postmarked by Nov. 3
Utah, 12pm, postmarked by Nov. 3

November 19:
Alaska

November 25:
Washington, oath sign/dated by Nov. 4

"COP" Stands for Close Of Polls.

MAILING OPTIONS FOR VOTING MATERIALS

Voters in Australia have a number of options for mailing Federal Postcard Applications, voted state ballots, and Federal Write-in Absentee Ballots to their local election officials in the United States. Mailing addresses for local election officials and state mailing deadlines can be found in the Voting Assistance Guide, available on-line at www.fvap.gov.

- First Class Mail: You may mail your Federal Postcard Application or voted ballot to the United States through the Australia Post system, with appropriate international postage. Mail to the U.S. takes approximately 10-12 days.

-FPO Military Mail: FPO mail to the United States leaves daily (M-F) from the Consulate and takes approximately 2 days to get to the U.S.; mail speed once within the U.S. varies and could take 5-10 days. Voters should submit their ballots to the U.S. Consulate no later than October 21 for FPO mail. Ballots must be postage-paid or have first-class U.S. postage.

-Express Courier: Last-minute voters can use express courier services such as FedEx, UPS and DHL to send their voted ballots to all states and territories except Alabama. Express courier companies cannot deliver to post office boxes, so you will need to know the street address of your local voting official in the United States. Mail sent by express courier companies is not postmarked. Contact information for some local express courier companies follows:

Fed Ex: www.fedex.com or

<https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/overseas/ExpressYourVote.htm>

Note: From September 15 to October 29, FedEx will ship voted ballots to the U.S. free from Australia.

UPS: www.ups.com

DHL: www.dhl.com

COVERAGE OF THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES AVAILABLE TO ALL CITIZENS AT HOME AND ABROAD

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) has joined with the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) to make the 2008 election debates more valuable to Americans abroad. Debate Watch is the CPD's nonpartisan, international program that brings U.S. citizens together to watch and discuss this fall's presidential and vice presidential debates.

At the end of each debate and before commentary begins, the facilitator will turn off the broadcast and lead participants in a discussion about the debate, the candidates, and the upcoming election. After finishing their discussion, participants may log on to the CPD's website, www.debates.org, to fill out a voluntary survey and provide feedback to the CPD. If you would like to learn more about Debate Watch or register to organize one of these meetings, please see www.debates.org, or email debatewatch@debates.org.

For the 2008 general election, CPD teamed up with MySpace to create a new website, www.MyDebates.org. The website which will be operational in early September will try and enhance the educational value of the debates while engaging new audiences. The CPD believes, "the Internet can be used to personalize the debates in a way that allows for in-depth examination by individual citizens and joint

discussion with others." The new website will include tools for citizens to make scorecards of important issues and help track the issues throughout the debates.

Voters can submit questions for possible inclusion in the town meeting debate via www.MyDebates.org. This new venture plans to offer unprecedented access and flexibility in following these debates through forums that discuss numerous topics.

More information about the CPD and MyDebates.org can be found at www.debates.org.

The schedules for this fall's remaining debates are as follows:

Second presidential debate	Tuesday, October 7
Third presidential debate	Wednesday, October 15

The debates will have a single moderator and last for 90 minutes. All debates will begin at 9 pm E.T., and will be carried by international media outlets. Australian TV media outlets have published the following broadcast schedule:

SBS

WORLD NEWS AUSTRALIA:

World News Australia will broadcast all presidential debates and the vice presidential debate, commercial-free. The debates (screened live in the eastern states) will be concluded with local analysis by expert Australian commentators.

In addition, all debates will be screened live on www.sbs.com.au

America Decides: The Vice-Presidential Debate

Friday October 3

10:55am – 12:30pm (LIVE EST only)

Joseph Biden v. Sarah Palin on domestic and foreign policy.

America Decides: The Second Presidential Debate

Wednesday October 8

11:55am – 1.30pm (LIVE EST only)

Barack Obama v. John McCain in a "town meeting" format.

America Decides: The Third Presidential Debate

Thursday October 16

11:55am – 1.30pm (LIVE EST only)

Barack Obama v. John McCain on foreign policy.

On Election Day, World News Australia will begin its special coverage from 3.30pm, using live CNN feeds, reports from Walleye award-winning senior correspondent Brian Thomson and others on the ground, complimented by analysis from experts in the studio.

America Decides: The Presidential Election Result

Wednesday November 5

3.30pm – 6.30pm approx (LIVE in all centers)

ABC

*Live on **ABC 1** and online at abc.net.au/news*

Friday October 3

11.00am – 12.30pm

U.S. Vice Presidential Debate

12.30pm – 1.00pm

Midday Report

Wednesday October 8

12.00pm – 1.30pm

U.S. Second Presidential Debate

1.30pm – 2.00pm

Midday Report

Thursday October 16

12.00pm – 1.30pm

U.S. Third Presidential Debate

1.30pm – 2.00pm

Midday Report

Election Night Watch Coverage

With the support of the Public Diplomacy office of the U.S. Consulate General, local American organizations plan to host Election Night Watch coverage events in each capital. The American Chamber of Commerce of Victoria has announced that this event in Melbourne will occur from 10:00am - 3:00pm at the Rydges Hotel. For event information in other areas, please directly contact the Australian American Association offices listed on our Web site at

<http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/americanorg.html>.

EMBASSY NOTICE ON PRC MILK PRODUCTS

On September 24, the U.S. Embassy in Canberra issued a formal notice to all U.S. Government employees in Australia concerning milk products from the People's Republic of China (PRC). For the reference of U.S. citizens in Australia, we are printing below the pertinent text. For further information on this topic, please directly contact the relevant Australian authorities.

China's Ministry of Health reported over the weekend that nearly 40,000 children have sought medical treatment related to the consumption of melamine-contaminated powdered infant formula. Almost 12,900 are currently hospitalized.

Three deaths have been confirmed as being related to contamination of infant formula. One is under further investigation.

Investigations so far have shown that nearly 70 batches of milk powders, made by 22 different companies, contained varying levels of melamine. These have been recalled.

The General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China has said that infant formula produced by 87 other companies is safe. Manufacturers who are reassuring the public that their infant milk formulas are safe include Nestlé and Mead Johnson.

The United States Food and Drug Administration has issued an advisory (see link below) that warns caregivers not to use any infant formula manufactured in China.

In addition to powdered baby milk, some news reports say other products may also be contaminated, including regular milk being sold by three of China's biggest dairy companies: Yili, Mengniu and Guangming. Authorities of Singapore reported finding

melamine in dairy products manufactured in China. Specifically an ice cream product made by Shanghai Yili AB Foods has been recalled due to melamine contamination.

The chemical melamine is used in manufacturing plastic and other industrial products. It may have been added to the milk to disguise diluted milk. Melamine makes the milk appear higher in protein than it actually is. Melamine may cause kidney stones and can lead to kidney failure. The World Health Organization has answered some questions in more detail about melamine on its website (link below).

All milk products manufactured in China should be avoided until further information is available, unless the manufacturers have confirmed their products are free from contamination. Infants and children in particular should avoid continued exposure to any milk or milk product that may have been contaminated with melamine and seek medical attention if they develop symptoms. Symptoms may include unexplained crying in infants, especially when urinating, possible vomiting, blood in the urine, stones discharged when urinating, or painful urinating.

[WHO Q&A on Melamine](#)
[WHO Epidemiology and Treatment](#)
[FDA Statement on Melamine](#)

BRING YOUR OWN PHOTOCOPIES OR PAY THE FEES

We wish to remind all of our American Citizen Services clients that as announced in our January newsletter and posted on the Mission Australia Consular Services Web site, photocopies as well as the original supporting documents have to be submitted with all applications for passports, Consular Reports of Birth Abroad, Social Security Numbers and federal benefits. We can photocopy the documents for you; however, this service incurs a fee of US\$1.00 per page.

CONSULAR OUTREACH – COMING TO A CAPITAL NEAR YOU!!

The American Citizen Services Unit conducts periodic trips to Adelaide, Darwin, and Hobart to provide passport, registration, and other citizenship services that cannot be performed through the mail. We most recently conducted such visits to Adelaide and Hobart in September. Subject to workload demand and funding, we tentatively plan visits to each capital in December 2008. While we are committed to trying to provide this service on a quarterly basis, budgetary restrictions and other constraints may delay these visits. If you wish to register for notices of when a consular officer may be coming to one of these towns for consular outreach, please email us at MelbourneACS@state.gov. The visits are also advertised on our Web site, <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov>.

REQUIREMENTS TO RENEW PASSPORTS FOR MINORS FROM FEBRUARY 01

Effective February 1, 2008, there was a worldwide change to the way passports are processed for children under the age of 16. For further details, please consult our Web site at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs.html>.

AVIAN INFLUENZA – BE PREPARED!

The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility that Avian Influenza may affect U.S. citizens overseas and provides extensive information on how U.S. citizens may prepare and protect themselves against the global disease. This includes an Avian Influenza Fact Sheet, http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html. Additional information may be available at www.travel.state.gov.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE (IRS) FORMS ON LINE

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax forms for preparing annual tax returns are available online at <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/index.html>. Please note that the Consular Section cannot provide U.S. taxpayer assistance, specifically in preparing tax returns. We also do not stock or provide tax forms given that those are now available on line. Rather, all queries should be directed to the IRS using the information at www.irs.gov.

ON-LINE APPOINTMENT SERVICE FOR AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES

Effective November 5, 2007, all American Citizen Services require an appointment. The appointment system allows Americans requiring services to schedule their appointment times in advance, allowing for a greater flexibility of services and reduced waiting periods. Please book now for appointments over the next two months. Americans are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this new service by booking their appointment online from the relevant service page at [Melbourne.usconsulate.state.gov](http://melbourne.usconsulate.state.gov). If your service does not require a personal appearance, you will be instructed on how to apply through the mail. For further details, please consult our Web site at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs.html>.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

For the reference of U.S. citizens in or traveling through Australia, and without endorsing or recommending any specific club or organizations, the U.S. Mission in Australia maintains a list of clubs and/or organizations relevant to U.S. citizens. That list is available at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/americanorg.html>.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

The Department of State recently revised its Travel Information system to provide Country Specific Information Sheets, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings for places throughout the world. For the most current information published by the Department of State, please go directly to www.travel.state.gov. To receive this information automatically, please register through the Internet-Based Registration System (IBRS) at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>.

USEFUL WEB SITES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

The following Web sites and telephone numbers are provided for the reference of U.S. citizens, without endorsing or recommending any organization. The U.S.

Consulate General does not accept responsibility for the contents of these sites nor the information provided by these offices.

* Domestic Violence (24 hours): 1-800-65-6463 (toll free)

* Rape Counseling: <http://www.casa.org.au> in Melbourne, <http://www.yarrowplace.sa.gov.au/> in Adelaide, <http://www.sass.org.au/> in Tasmania, <http://www.rubygaea.org.au/> in Darwin.

* For information on Australian visas: contact the Australian Department of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA) at www.immi.gov.au.

* To obtain Australian birth/death/marriage certificates for all Australian states, visit www.bdm.nsw.gov.au.

* For questions concerning U.S. customs rules and regulations, check out the U.S. Customs website at www.cbp.gov. For information about taking your pet to the U.S., please consult the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website at www.aphis.usda.gov.

* Social Security Administration: For the latest in social security information, go to www.ssa.gov for news and announcements.

* Veterans Administration: Obtain up-to-date information about entitlements to VA benefits at www.va.gov. For VA Education Benefits, go to www.gibill.va.gov.

* Internal Revenue Service: For tax forms and other timely information, go to www.irs.gov.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS AND CONSULATE CLOSURES

For a list of upcoming holidays and Consulate General closures, please consult our Web site at <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/holidays.html>. The U.S. Embassy in Canberra has published the following schedule of public holidays and Consulate General closures in 2009:

Mission Australia Public Holidays for 2009			
Public Holiday	Country	Observed By	Date Observed
New Year's Day	U.S./Australia	All posts	Thursday, January 1, 2009
Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday	U.S.	All posts	Monday, January 19, 2009
Australia Day	Australia	All posts	Monday, January 26, 2009
Washington's Birthday	U.S.	All posts	Monday, February 16, 2009
Labor Day	Australia	Perth only	Monday, March 2, 2009
Labor Day	Australia	Melbourne only	Monday, March 9, 2009
Canberra Day	Australia	Canberra only	Monday, March 9, 2009
Good Friday	Australia	All posts	Friday, April 10, 2009
Easter Monday	Australia	All posts	Monday, April 13, 2009
Anzac Day	Australia	Canberra, Perth, Sydney only	Monday, April 27, 2009

Memorial Day	U.S.	All posts	Monday, May 25, 2009
Foundation Day	Australia	Perth only	Monday, June 1, 2009
Queen's Birthday	Australia	Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney only	Monday, June 8, 2009
Independence Day	U.S.	All posts	Friday, July 3, 2009
Labor Day	U.S.	All posts	Monday, September 7, 2009
Queen's Birthday	Australia	Perth only	Monday, September 28, 2009
Labor Day	Australia	Canberra, Sydney only	Monday, October 5, 2009
Columbus Day	U.S.	All posts	Monday, October 12, 2009
Melbourne Cup Day	Australia	Melbourne only	Tuesday, November 3, 2009
Family and Community Day	Australia	Canberra only	Tuesday, November 3, 2009
Veterans Day	U.S.	All posts	Wednesday, November 11, 2009
Thanksgiving Day	U.S.	All posts	Thursday, November 26, 2009
Christmas Day	U.S./Australia	All posts	Friday, December 25, 2009
Boxing Day	Australia	All posts	Monday, December 28, 2009
New Year's Day	U.S./Australia	All posts	Friday, January 1, 2010

This newsletter is published by the American Citizens Services Unit, U.S. Consulate General, Melbourne, e-mail: MelbourneACS@state.gov; website: <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov>. Effective November 5, 2007, all services by online appointment only.